



*Living Well*

*June is National Drive Safe Month*

## FUEL FOR THOUGHT

*Only cigarette smoking and heart disease kill more people than auto accidents in America. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for every age group from 6 through 28 years old. Although accidents are an accepted risk of driving, most crashes are completely avoidable.*

### Ten Common Driving Mistakes

#### ■ Inattentive Driving

Some of the most common driving distractions include eating, drinking, applying make-up, talking on the phone, adjusting the radio or temperature controls, attending to children, or even just talking to passengers. Some drivers completely “zone out” while others focus on single tasks, such as looking for an address, and neglect all others. Consider this: A vehicle moves 1.5 feet per second for each mile-per-hour it is traveling. At 60 miles per hour, for example, with every second that elapses the vehicle travels almost 90 feet — all the while we’re trying to read that billboard on the side of the road.

#### ■ Impaired Driving

Fatigue is a common impairment that results in collisions because it limits our coordination and ability to multitask effectively. Even minor illnesses or the use of certain medications can affect our ability to maintain control of a vehicle. Since alcohol affects our vision and judgment, and slows our ability to think and perform motor skills, it has a dramatic effect on reaction time and distance. Many people do not realize that impairment often begins at blood alcohol levels as low as .04%—less than half the “legal limit.”

#### ■ Driving Too Fast for Conditions

Darkness can significantly restrict visibility. By the time headlights finally light up a road hazard, it is often too late to avoid it. Many experts assert that even 50 mph is too fast for conditions at night, on any dark roadway. Fog and precipitation are other elements that influence driving behaviors. The first thing to do when the rain (or snow) starts to fall is slow down. The “driving instructor rule of thumb” is to slow down by a third in the rain, and by at least half in the snow; considerably more if ice is present.

#### ■ Making Assumptions

Most collisions occur when the “other guy” does something we don’t expect, or when we do something they don’t expect. People have different levels of understanding and respect for the rules of the road so it is important to drive defensively. Be on the lookout for potential dangers; be prepared to react suddenly; and be mindful of your driving habits so you don’t cause problems for other people, such as failing to signal a lane change, or tailgating someone in a turning lane.

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### ■ Driving at Excessive Speed

Speeding increases your risk in two ways: it cuts your reaction time and results in more “stored” energy that must be dissipated in any collision. It comes down to math and physics. Each incremental increase in speed reduces your ability to react to hazards because you may be covering distance in less time than it takes to react. The average normal reaction time is between .75 second and 1.5 seconds. Average reaction time distance at 50 mph would be approximately 83 feet. At 70 mph, it is over 115 feet (over 7 car lengths). The extra 32 feet required does not factor in braking time.

### ■ Failing to Check Mirrors

It is important to pay attention to what’s going on in front of you, but safe driving requires you to check your mirrors every 5 to 8 seconds as a way to keep track of the vehicles around you.

### ■ Not Checking Blind Spots

Virtually all vehicles have areas that are obscured from view of the driver—even motorcycles. Yet, some drivers habitually change lanes without checking their blind spots. The location and size of blind spots depends on the vehicle but many obstructed areas are large enough to hide other vehicles, therefore it’s also a good idea to avoid driving in other vehicle’s blind spots whenever you can.

### ■ Driving While Upset

When your emotions are running high, your judgment can fail you. It is best to pull off the road and wait until you have calmed down. When other drivers are discourteous, rude, or make mistakes on the road that aggravate you, try to avoid letting it affect your behavior. You stand to gain nothing by losing control of your emotions.

### ■ Ignoring Essential Auto Maintenance

Be sure to inspect your tires regularly. Over time, air leaks from the tire valve, thereby reducing the air pressure. Low air pressure adversely affects braking performance, and can also affect your ability to steer and corner. You should have your brakes checked regularly. There are numerous other car parts that affect a driver’s ability to drive safely beyond tires and brakes so follow manufacturer guidelines for routine maintenance.

### ■ Following Too Closely

Under good driving conditions, vehicles should maintain at least two seconds of following distance. To apply the “two second rule,” watch as the vehicle ahead passes a mark on the surface of the road. Then count “one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two.” If you reach the object too soon, you’re risking not having adequate reaction time. Leave more space when you can, and leave additional space if following a vehicle with different characteristics than yours. For instance, motorcycles can often stop faster than you, and trucks impede your vision, which can cause you not to see hazards until too late. Slippery road conditions require significantly more following distance so use extreme caution.

For information or assistance with any family, health or personal problem, contact SYMMETRY at (414) 256-4800 or (800) 236-7905 for confidential assistance.



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